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af&co. Celebrates 20 Years of Creativity, Connection and Hospitality Storytelling

The Award-Winning Hospitality Public Relations and Marketing Agency Marks Two Decades of Setting the Standard of Excellence



PC: Kristen Loken; See more images [HERE](#)

SAN FRANCISCO, CA - DECEMBER 3, 2025 - On December 3, 2025, [af&co.](#), the San Francisco-based hospitality marketing and public relations agency founded by [Andrew Freeman](#), celebrates 20 years of shaping how the world experiences hospitality. What began in 2005 as one man's vision in his San Francisco living room has evolved into a nationally recognized creative powerhouse honored as PRSA's Small Agency of the Year, named among PR Net's Top 100 PR Agencies, featured on the Inc. 5000 list of fastest-growing private companies and included for ten consecutive years among the San Francisco Business Times' Top 50 LGBTQ-Owned Businesses.

From the very start, Freeman's mission was simple: to reimagine how agencies partner with their hospitality clients - building true collaborations focused on putting butts in seats and heads in beds to truly make an impact. Two decades later, af&co. has launched more than 500 restaurants, hotels and lifestyle brands and helped shape the hospitality identity of the Bay Area and beyond - from neighborhood favorites to James Beard Award-winning chefs, Michelin-starred dining rooms and landmark destinations. In 2019, Freeman and longtime af&co. colleague Candace MacDonald, founded [Carbonate](#), a branding, insights and creative strategy focused firm. With these expanded services, Freeman has become one of the country's most respected leaders in hospitality storytelling and brand building.

"When I started af&co., I wanted to make an impact," says Andrew Freeman, Founder and CEO. "Twenty years later, we've done that – not only for our clients, but for our community and our industry. We've grown, evolved and continued to redefine what excellence looks like in our space. Today, af&co. is a category leader, and we remain committed to telling the best stories with heart, creativity and fearless hospitality."

A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP, A FUTURE OF INFLUENCE

At the heart of af&co.'s success is Freeman's unwavering belief that hospitality is about people first. Before "brand storytelling" became a buzzword, Freeman was already reimagining how restaurants, hotels and destinations could connect with guests through emotion, experiences that drive relevance and revenue, and authenticity.

His work with industry and community organizations like SF Travel, Golden Gate Restaurant Association, Taste Tri-Valley, Oakland Restaurant Collective and Savor Oakland underscores a deep commitment to the communities that fuel the hospitality industry. That commitment extends far beyond the dining room. Over the years, Freeman and af&co. have consistently supported charitable organizations focused on women's empowerment (Dress for Success) and hunger relief (Meals on Wheels, Foodwise) along with other LGBTQ+ causes. Since inception, there hasn't been a time when af&co. wasn't actively engaging in giving back. Along the way, Freeman has mentored countless professionals, built lasting client relationships, and led with an entrepreneurial spirit that continues to define the agency's DNA.

Freeman's journey - from his early days with The French Culinary Institute, New York's storied Russian Tea Room, the legendary Rainbow Room, iconic Windows on the World and Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants to ultimately launching af&co. - is one of vision, grit and boundless creativity.

"When I started, there was no social media. We were still using cell phones without texting," he recalls. "We've evolved with every shift - digital storytelling, influencer partnerships, brand strategy, AI - and through it all, we've stayed true to our purpose: telling stories that connect people."

That commitment has paid off. Today, af&co. is respected across the country for blending strategy and creativity to drive revenue and create incredible guest experiences. In recognition of its lasting influence, the City and County of San Francisco, led by Mayor Lurie, recently honored af&co. with a Certificate of Honor, celebrating the agency's 20 years of creativity, leadership and impact on the Bay Area's hospitality community.

THE AF&CO. + CARBONATE HOSPITALITY TRENDS REPORT: A CULTURAL BENCHMARK

Now in its 18th year, the annual [af&co. and Carbonate trends report](#) has become a cornerstone of hospitality thought leadership. Recognized by *The New York Times*, *Nation's Restaurant News*, *Forbes* and many others, the report identifies the most significant forces shaping the year ahead across food, beverage, hotels, travel, marketing and social media.

Across nearly two decades of reporting, af&co. and Carbonate have accurately forecasted many of the defining movements in modern food and culture - from the rise of non-alcoholic drinking and the mainstreaming of vegetarian and vegan cuisines to the growing impact of cross-cultural cooking. Alongside these broader shifts, the agencies have also spotted the smaller waves that capture the public's imagination - the ube craze, the quesabirria boom, the pistachio renaissance and even the ascent of "Dubai chocolate." Each trend underscores the ability to anticipate where consumer desire, creativity, and commerce intersect.

"I've been proud to watch this report evolve into a true industry benchmark," says Candace MacDonald, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Carbonate. *"We've helped hospitality leaders anticipate where culture is heading - and turn those insights into ideas that surprise, delight, and resonate."*

LOOKING AHEAD: THE NEXT ERA OF HOSPITALITY STORYTELLING

As af&co. marks this milestone, the agency is focused squarely on the future: one driven by gratitude, innovation and community. Freeman and his team plan to continue expanding af&co.'s national presence, particularly in Southern California and key travel markets, while investing in digital storytelling, content creation and emerging technologies like AI-driven insights.

"From the very beginning of my career, I've believed that restaurants do more than serve food...they create connections," says Andrew Freeman, Founder and CEO. *"I've seen it firsthand, from the reopening of Windows on the World to our work supporting Oakland's incredible dining community. Restaurants bring people together in ways few places can. That belief has guided af&co. for twenty years, and it continues to inspire everything we do."*

For brands ready to stand out, af&co. is a strategic partner, creative catalyst and cultural storyteller committed to helping clients make an impact that lasts. To learn more about af&co.'s services, or to inquire about collaboration opportunities, email info@afandco.com.

ABOUT af&co.

af&co. is an award-winning lifestyle marketing and public relations agency headquartered in the San Francisco Bay Area, with offices in Los Angeles and clients spanning coast to coast. Known for its forward-thinking approach, the agency combines creative and strategic consulting, marketing, and public relations to deliver results that go far beyond the traditional agency model. With more than 500 successful hospitality and lifestyle concept launches and ongoing marketing services for hundreds more, af&co. has built a reputation as a trusted leader in the industry. Now in its 20th year, af&co. continues to focus on what it is most passionate about - hotels & resorts, restaurants & chefs, lifestyle brands, wine & spirits, and travel & destinations - helping clients bring bold ideas to life while driving lasting impact. Follow along [@afandco](#).

ABOUT Carbonate

Carbonate is a creative agency that builds, reinvigorates, and grows brands and hospitality concepts. Specializing in food, beverage, restaurants, hotels & hospitality tech/B2B, Carbonate's services include brand

strategy, identity development, trend insights, design, and integrated brand communications. Prior to launching as an independent company, Carbonate was a division of San Francisco-based af&co. Together af&co. and Carbonate produce an annual Hospitality Trends Report, with insights consistently cited by outlets including The New York Times, Forbes, and more. Carbonate also produces Insight Out, a weekly insights publication dedicated to emerging hospitality and branding trends. Carbonate was ranked #45 on the 2025 Inc. Regionals: Midwest list—the most prestigious ranking of the fastest-growing private companies in the Midwest. Follow along [@carbonategroup](#).

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